BT
220
N34
GTU
Storage

Walter Williams

NEW TRACTS ON THE CREED. No. III.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AT HAND REPENT YE AND BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

The Meaning of the Incarnation

"*And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost.*"

By ALEXANDER NAIRNE, D.D.

Professor of Hebrew, King's College, London, Canon of Chester, Examining Chaplain to the Bishop of St. Albans.

GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL UNION LIBRARY 1962

BT 220 N34

FOR THE NATIONAL MISSION
R PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE
ON: 68 HAYMARKET, S.W

2d. net; Twelve Copies, 1s. 6d. net.

New Tracts on the Apostles' Cree

BT
220
N34

Supervising Editors:

H. S. HOLLAND, D.D., Regius Professor of Divinity, University Oxford.

V. H. STANTON, D.D., Regius Professor of Divinity, University Cambridge.

General Editor:

G. K. A. BELL, M.A., Resident Chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbu

I. Faith	"I believe"	**T. B. Strong, D.** *Dean of Chr Church.*
II. God	"In God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth:"	**C. F. D'Arcy, D.** *Bishop of Down*
III. The Meaning of the Incarnation	"And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,"	**A. Nairne, D.D.,** *fessor of Hebr King's Colle, London.*
IV. Jesus Christ and History	"Born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate,"	**V. H. Stanton, D**
V. Jesus Christ and Sin	"Was crucified, dead, and buried, He descended into Hell;"	**J. K. Mozley, B** *Dean of Pembr College, Cambric*
VI. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ	"The third day he rose again from the dead,"	**H. S. Holland, D**
VII. The Ascension of Jesus Christ	"He ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty;"	**F. H. Chase, D** *Bishop of Ely.*
VIII. Jesus Christ as Judge	"From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead."	**H. B. Swete, D** *Late Regius Pro sor of Divinity, U versity of Cambr*
IX. The Holy Spirit	"I believe in the Holy Ghost;"	**R. G. Parsons, M** *Prebendary Wells.*
X. The Holy Trinity	" " "	**H. L. Goudge, D** *Principal of Theological Coll*
XI. The Church ...	"The holy Catholick Church;"	**J. N. Figgis, Litt** *Hon. Fellow o Catherine's Coll Cambridge.*
XII. The Communion of Saints	"The Communion of Saints;"	**A. E. J. Rawlins M.A.** *Studen Christ Chur Oxford.*
XIII. Forgiveness ...	"The Forgiveness of sins:"	**L. S. Thornt M.A.** *Late Sch of Emmanuel lege, Cambridg*
XIV. The Life after Death	"The Resurrection of the body, And the life everlasting."	**R. H. Malden, M** *Principal of L Clergy School.*

The first six Tracts are now ready. Nos. VII.—X. will be published in September; Nos. XI.—XIV. in October. (1916.)

The Meaning of the Incarnation

"And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost."

IT is unnecessary to insist on the supreme attraction of the character of our Lord as portrayed in the Gospels. It is felt by all, and there are few, even among those who do not accept the teaching of the Apostles concerning His divine Person, but wish, and to some extent try, to become like Him. If that attempt is made with anything like constancy it may be held to mark a man as a Christian, though not as a Churchman. He is, so far as the past can ever be repeated, in the position of the Galilean disciples before the Resurrection. But it may be doubted whether it is possible for anyone to continue in such a position without development. It was not possible for those first disciples. Their love and admiration were connected with the thought of the Kingdom of God, and the relation of our Lord to it. His proclamation that the long-desired Kingdom was at hand had first drawn them to Him. In Him they saw, what had been looked for till then in vain, absolute fidelity to the pure ideal of that Kingdom. Here, in this positive form and not in the mere impossibility of catching Him in a fault, we perceive from the first the recognition of His perfect goodness. And from His lips, too, they heard an accent of authority different from any that had been heard before. "The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye and believe in the good tidings" (Mark i. 15) went

15,586

beyond any message which the prophets had introduced with their "Thus saith the Lord." When the end of the ministry was approaching, and the Lord put the question "Whom do men, whom do ye say that I am?" St. Peter's answer brought to clear expression what was doubtless moving in the mind of others besides the Twelve. "Thou art the Christ," St. Peter said, and in that title at least one-half of what we mean by the Godhead of our Lord was implied. "The Christ"—*i.e.*, "the Anointed of the Lord"—had indeed been the designation of all the kings of Judah from Saul onwards. In 2 Sam. vii. it is explained as including the relationship of a son to God as Father. That might have degenerated into a simple metaphor. But in the actual course of Jewish faith quite the contrary took place. The post-exilic Jewish Church, reading in the books of Isaiah and Daniel the same great vision as we read, of One to come who was to be named "Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah ix. 6), whose dominion was to be "an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His Kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Daniel vii. 14), deepened their conception of the Messiah, the Christ, in the same direction as we have deepened it in Christian thought. When our Lord was born a world of hopes were stirring Jewish minds of a Kingdom of God which would not be of this world, and of a Christ, the Son of God, the herald and prince of that Kingdom, who should be recognised as divine.

No doubt these hopes were various—not always purely spiritual. No doubt the term "divine" is more precise than the vague hopes of those preparatory days. What the disciples found in their Lord Jesus was a power, of a strangely unexpected kind, which brought unity and

precision into this variety and vagueness: "In Jesus Christ all contradictions are reconciled." We discern the process beginning in the early chapters of the Acts. It is St. Paul who brings it to full effect. He had not known Jesus of Nazareth in "the days of His flesh," and though he felt as all do the attraction of His character, that character was displayed to him in the Lord's death for the sake of men, and in the great act of God which set the seal to His Christship, the Resurrection: He was "born of the seed of David according to the flesh, declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead" (Romans i. 4). From this all the rest of St. Paul's large creed sprang: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself: Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. v. 19, 21); Christ is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in Him were all things created . . . He is before all things, and in Him all things consist" (Col. i. 15-17); and St. Paul associates the name of Jesus Christ with the Father and the Spirit in a divine Trinity, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with you all" (2 Cor. xiii. 14).

In all this St. Paul was but following out the most advanced Jewish doctrine of his time, as he himself claimed according to Acts xxiv. 14 *f*; only, he believed the hope of his people to be realised in our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no infringement upon that doctrine of the "one God" on which the Jew so earnestly insisted. And we, too, must insist on that if we would think of the Incarnation as Holy Scripture directs us. "Jesus the believer's God" is far from scriptural

language. Even such a compound term as "the God-man" somewhat jars upon an ear attuned to the New Testament; at least it must not be allowed to suggest either that in Jesus Christ apart from the Father we worship God, or that His manhood is different in kind from the manhood of all men. The strong, one might almost say the daring, monotheism of St. Paul is remarkably illustrated by his vision of "the end" in 1 Cor. xv. 28: "And when all things have been subjected unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subjected unto Him that did subject all things unto Him, that God may be all in all." It would be hazardous to pretend to fathom the profundity of this. But St. Paul does appear to be inspired with some great idea of a time or state in which all such terms as "Son," "Christ," "Trinity," must prove inadequate to picture the ultimate fulfilment of the rich unity of Godhead.

Here St. Paul shows the masculine intellect with which he was endowed. But generally he dwells on the moral side of doctrine. To himself the revelation of Christ had come as an overpowering moral force. Shame, hope, love, trust, were wakened in him. He passed from moral impotence under the Law to a new life according to the Spirit of holiness. And this he knew to have been brought about by Christ's death and victory through death. This leads us first to notice the general truth—that the doctrine of the Incarnation makes its essential appeal to our moral sense. It is indeed a doctrine of inexhaustible interest to the intellect. Yet it may be grasped with little or no intellectual exercise by those to whom such exercise on sacred subjects is uncongenial. On the other hand, all dispute about it which is empty of moral interest is certain to go wrong. If we try to treat it as a purely

intellectual matter, questions soon take a form which renders them unanswerable; they pass from the region of "reality" into that of "appearance," like the questions "Was there a beginning of time?" "Is there a limit to space?" This is in fact true of all "spiritual" ideas. Sooner or later we are compelled to shape them in terms of moral goodness, else discourse becomes barren; so, for instance, when we try to think out St. Paul's "spiritual body." To this consideration we shall return later.

But besides this, the form which the revelation of Christ took for St. Paul brings another point to our notice which will again and again come up in all thought about the Incarnation. The truth as he saw it was not as he would have expected to see it; the great fact was what we style paradoxical. His Jewish ancestors and teachers had been looking for the Christ. But it was a new thing to find the proof of Christship in a death of shame and apparent defeat. This is another point, yet it brings us quickly back to what we have just been considering. Christ's death was shameful as His ministry had been obscure. But reflection shows that we can conceive of no other way in which an equal moral grandeur could have been achieved. If "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself"—and that is the essence of the Incarnation—anything commonly accounted fame or success would have been a vulgar shift; "sacrifice," the ideal of Christ's humility, stands alone among the activities possible to man as absolutely akin to the divine love.

In the prologue to the Gospel according to St. John the Incarnation is approached from another side. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . all things were made by

Him . . . in Him was life." Here is an idea which had been in the mind of Greek philosophers; more lately, in the mind of some Jews also. God, who in Himself would be beyond the reach of human comprehension, has made Himself manifest through His Word, in Whom creation has been wrought, and in Whom all created life has its being. "And the life was the light of men . . . There was the true light, even the light which lighteth every man, coming into the world." Here is a further thought. This Word is also to be recognised in man; in his intellect, but still more in the faculty with which man is endowed of communion with the divine; for here, too, the moral aspect chiefly interested even the philosophers of the Gentiles. And they, too, would partly understand the hope indicated in the last phrase, "coming into the world"; for they too had vague aspirations which are seen, when once the idea has been defined, to be summed up in the thought of Incarnation. Yet from the actual fact of Incarnation, of God coming in the person of a real man, to dwell as a man among other men, and that in lowliness and obscurity, these thinkers would have shrunk. Again, as with St. Paul so with St. John, the thing expected was realised in an unexpected manner. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

That is what St. John most insists upon. Unlike St. Paul, he is filled with the recollections of our Lord's life as very man among men on earth. That was why he wrote his Gospel. In an actual history, the wonder of which arises, sacramentally, out of its lowliness and simplicity, he finds the only way of really interpreting the vast idea of the Word Who was from the beginning with God and Who was and is God.

" And so the Word had breath, and wrought
With human hands the creed of creeds,
In loveliness of perfect deeds,
More strong than all poetic thought ;

" Which he may read that binds the sheaf,
Or builds the house, or digs the grave,
And those wild eyes that watch the wave
In roarings round the coral reef " ;

or as the Evangelist himself puts it : " The Word dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."

St. Paul, then, from the Jewish side carried on the first disciples' reverence for the great Master into the belief in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, associated with the Father in the unity of Godhead. St. John, with a wider approach, carried it on into the belief in Jesus as the Word of God Who is God. St. Paul's conception of the Incarnation might be summed up in the sentence, " God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself " ; St. John's in " The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The passage from St. Paul is taken from an Epistle, 2 Corinthians, which needs no critical defence. Even if it be allowed that the date and authorship of the fourth Gospel present complicated questions—that is a fairer way to put it than to speak of " difficulties "—still it must be insisted upon that the deeper modern criticism goes the more evident it becomes that behind all the apostolic writings there lies a popular and primitive tradition which enshrined a surprisingly high view of the Person of Christ. We can have little doubt that, first on the line of Jewish thought about the Christ, and soon after on the more universal line of

thought about the Word, the primitive Church rose to belief in the Incarnation. St. Paul and St. John did not start that belief; they guided it in more scrupulous reverence and reasonableness. Above all, they insist on its being realised practically and morally in our own daily life.

Few, however, who read this tract are likely to feel the critical difficulties acutely. It is not impossible that some may feel another kind of difficulty. Perhaps it might be described as the difficulty of common sense. What is meant will be seen if such persons will compare together two passages from which quotations have already been made, Romans i. 1-7 and Colossians i. 13-23. They may say, "The first of these passages I readily accept; the second demands an assent of quite another kind. In Romans I seem to read of a man uniquely inspired, to whose life continued after death—the like of which I would fain hope for other men—God vouchsafed unique testimony; in Colossians, of One who is so absolutely divine that I cannot also recognise him as a man. I do not question the earliness, nor even the correctness of this belief. But it is so extraordinary, that I do hesitate to accept it whole-heartedly as my own." A fair, because a scriptural, answer would be this: The doctrine of the Incarnation does call for something more than our common sense. It demands our recognition of something wonderful in life. But it is in all life, not separately in the Person of our Lord, that this wonderful element is to be recognised. The Godhead of our Lord is never represented in the New Testament as separating Him from us. It is because He is God that He can overpass the limits which divide person from person in ordinary experience. In Him life and love are deepened; we live in Him and are joined

together in Him. For himself, St. Paul expresses this effect of the Incarnation in Galatians ii. 20: "I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me." And though few would dare to say that they can as yet make this claim their own, it does describe the ideal to which each believer hopes he is progressing. Of the whole company of believers St. Paul continually asserts that they live "in Christ"; the phrase is characteristic of him, and the thought runs through all his teaching, his rebukes, and his encouragement. "Common sense" is apt to treat such sayings as forcible metaphors. But that recognition of a wonderful capacity in life, set free by the Incarnation, reverses the position. This union in Christ Who lifts men to God by virtue of His own Godhead is reality; the separations of our imperfect intercourse in the flesh are the shadows. If ever heart does reach another heart in fine thought or great deed it is because common life has been lifted up through Him—"That life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself up for me." Once more, as we noticed above and shall have to notice again, doctrine comes to effect in the spiritually moral region. Christ's love and sacrifice, our being crucified with Him; these are the conditions which on the one hand were made possible by the Incarnation, and on the other hand it is when these conditions become the main interest of life that the Incarnation is experienced as effectual.

In the Epistle to the Ephesians this idea of our living "in Christ" is worked out more distinctly. Here the ancient Jewish conception of the representative Christ—the Lord's Anointed who represents or includes the whole nation (*cf. e.g.*, Psalm lxxxix. 51, Hebrews xi.

26)—is developed. "Christ" in this epistle does of course mean the Lord Jesus. But it means more than "Jesus." It means Jesus exalted to the right hand of the Father, and now, in His Godhead enriched with manhood, gathering in, as part of Himself, all who follow and believe in Him. They are to grow with and in Him unto one "full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (iv. 13). The thought appears very remarkably in i. 23, which should be translated ". . . the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him Who is being all in all fulfilled"; see the Dean of Wells' *Exposition* of the Epistle, a small book in which this apostolic doctrine may be almost said to have been recovered for our generation. Not that it has ever been really lost. Tennyson's lines in *In Memoriam*, cvi, enshrine it:—

"Ring out, wild bells . . .

"Ring in the valiant man and free,
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;
Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be."

So, according to the more generous interpretation of the clause, does the Athanasian Creed: ". . . One Christ; One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh: but by taking of the manhood into God." And when we adopt from Ephesians the designation of the Church as "the Body of Christ," we mean the same; no mere metaphor, but a plain truth as real as it is wonderful. And by "real" we must understand "practical"—that is, as we have already observed, spiritually moral.

The first Epistle of St. John is a treatise on the Church considered as the extension of the Incarnation. The opening verse gives the theological theme; the rest of the Epistle works it out in practical precepts about brotherly love. In the brethren we see the Incarnate Christ manifested. That is why Christian charity passes so far beyond common sense in this earliest manual of "Christian Socialism": "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren" (iii. 13); "Hereby know we love, because He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (iii. 16); "Herein is love made perfect with us . . . because as He is, even so are we in this world" (iv. 17).

It should, however, be noticed that the term "Church" does not occur in this Epistle. The Church may be described as an extension of the Incarnation. But if the Incarnation does not extend also on other lines beside the line of the Church, at least it seems likely that, as the extension proceeds, we must expect to see the Church gathering strength by interaction with much that is as yet outside the boundary. No doubt St. John meant by "the brethren" those who had been baptised and were living in the community of Christ. In his day the division between these and "the whole world lying in the evil one" was unmistakable. But the light which came into the world with the Incarnate Word "lighteth every man" (John i. 9). It would dull the keen edge of St. John's precepts for ourselves if we still considered the brothers whom he bids us feed, clothe, love, and die for, as simply Churchmen. St. John insists on this love of the brethren being not "in word and with the tongue, but in deed and truth." In our modern way we should say that it

must not be merely academic. Love has perhaps grown somewhat cold of late because we have become too academic. We try to plan a unity for the Church on the model of past centuries; but can any unity be really spiritual which does not transform the present enmity of nations? We have explained the Sacraments, and with sincere reverence guarded the approach to the altar; and still our communion in the Body and Blood of Christ hardly affects the divisions between wealth and poverty, labour and capital. And meanwhile the boundaries are being blurred. Men are passing to a closer following of Christ who are not Churchmen, and some are striving with new boldness of self-sacrifice to realise the meaning of "we who are many, are one bread, one body," without caring, as things are, to "partake of the one bread" (1 Cor. x. 16 *f*).

It is not easy to set forth a definite remedy for such a state of things. But there is perhaps no need to propose rash remedies. As to St. Paul, when the quiet of his imprisonment succeeded to faithful labour in the midst of "fightings without, fears within," the idea of the one Church descended and harmonised his "care of all the Churches," so once again the idea of the one Church may be renewed, not by our anxious planning, but for us by God. Only, it is perhaps encouraging to remember that the light of the Incarnation prepares us for a manifold and unexpected development of the Church, and that the designation of the Church as "the body of Christ" is employed in Ephesians less to imply visible boundary than living growth; it is in closest connection with the living and growing doctrine of the Incarnation.

For growth, too, belongs to the doctrine. Christ exalted is still Christ Incarnate, and the discourses and

prayer in St. John's Gospel, xiii-xvii, promise that through the Holy Spirit the Incarnate Word will continuously manifest Himself in history, and thought, and in all that gradual deepening and harmonising of life by which we are being led onward out of blind enmities and selfish vanities into the rich effective fellowship of God's purpose for His creatures. That seems to be at least part of the significance of "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." And, illustrated by the prologue to this Gospel, that saying of the Lord appears to reach even beyond the destiny of man, to (what St. Paul has also just touched upon in Romans viii. 18-25) the destiny of all created life, of Nature. Two realms of thought and feeling have been widely opened in the last half-century. One opening has been by the advance of Natural Science. The other has been thus described: "The religious perception of our time, in its widest and most practical application, is the consciousness that our well-being, both material and spiritual, individual and collective, temporal and eternal, lies in the growth of brotherhood among all men—in their loving harmony with one another" (Leo Tolstoy, "What is Art?"). Both have been suspected as hostile to the strict faith. Already we have gone far towards perceiving that the suspicion was groundless. The doctrine of the Incarnation, as we ponder upon it more thoughtfully, and apply it more practically, leads us to anticipate still broader and more fruitful reconciliations. Erasmus wrote that "the Spirit of Christ flows forth more widely than our interpretations allow." We might speak in like manner of the Body of Christ, meaning that the hope which Erasmus threw out vaguely is capable of being worked out with precision in actual affairs.

A possible objection to all this may occur. Someone may say: "You have taken some ideas which are very general just now, and you have fitted them into the doctrine of the Incarnation. But there is no logical necessity to do so. All that is valuable in these ideas may indeed depend upon the doctrine of the Word of God, but would remain equally available though the Word had never become flesh. The life of the Lord Jesus is in itself beautiful and grand. You have shown how it came to be connected with these other ideas. But I do not see why I should not believe in these ideas without connecting them in any special manner with that life."

This objection overlaps the objection which was considered earlier in this paper, and the answer must be a development of the answer given there. But first, it may be admitted that minds are differently constituted, and that to some faith seems to be more stimulated by ideas than by persons. The doctrine of the Word, taken by itself, is nearer to an idea than to the devotion to a person. There seems, which to some is an attraction, more of the infinite in it. And just as it appeared allowable to recognise a degree of Christian faith in one who tried to follow the example of the Lord Jesus without accepting the deeper mystery of His Person, so, too, it may be that he whose heart is anchored in the Word enjoys a part of the Christian faith, even though his intellect is not much engaged by historical recollection of Jesus of Nazareth. Yet this faith is but elementary in either case; its worth lies mainly in its promise of growth. And those will feel this most to be true who most feel the difficulty of bringing the two lines together—the definite concrete life of a particular man on earth and the ideal life of the eternal Word. For in this, as in all serious problems,

the difficulty is the measure of the reality on which the problem turns. If that reality is absolute, the final solution always remains beyond our reach. Yet, on the other hand, our associated efforts towards solution unite us in the love of truth, throw light on other perplexities which beset our mortal condition, and assure us that the aspirations of manhood, though baffled, do run out into eternity. And indeed, when it is recognised that the term " eternal " is not antithetical to " on earth " the difficulty begins to vanish. Eternal life, according to the teaching of our Lord, especially as that teaching is interpreted in St. John, does not begin after death or in another world. Here and now we may be living eternal life. The new life on which we start and start again after each repentance is the eternal life. What shows our Lord lifted so high above all other men is that He needed not such repentances and always lived the eternal life without interruption. Then when this presence of eternity in earthly surroundings is recognised, that wonderful element of which we have already spoken grows larger and larger in all we have to do with, till it appears as the gleam of reality in things ; it is always on, in, and around us, while the shadows that partly obscure it pass and change. But the very centre of all this wonderful life is the wonder of the Person of Jesus Christ, and—though we dare not say all—yet most of those who have learned to delight in this rich marvel of universal life do find an inexhaustible joy in entering ever more deeply into the mystery of Christ's Person. He must be there as a definite Person, a person in the manner in which we ourselves know personality, else interest flags ; for even those who most enjoy ideas do find mere ideas unsatisfying if they are long cut off from intercourse

with persons, and it is hard to imagine any other way of tracing out the thought of Incarnation than by approaching it through the human manifestation of the incarnate Person. He must also not merely partake as we do in the eternal and universal; He must possess it as His own. Else there is no problem of His Person at all, and therefore no key to the thousand kindred problems which certainly do face us day by day. How the two become one in Jesus Christ we never succeed in determining. But the search carries us ever nearer to all that we mean by naming Him, and few who have started upon the search would hesitate to confess that to give it up would be for them the impoverishing of all they care about.

Yet an argument which reaches no conclusion is unsatisfactory. Is not the failure but another instance of what has been already noticed more than once in this paper, the mistake of trying to treat a spiritual and moral interest as an intellectual problem? Not that the intellect has no part to play in the matter. To suppose that would be stupid ingratitude to the great thinkers who have, to the glory of God and the benefit of sincere souls, devoted their faculties to the noblest of all studies, Christian philosophy. But these great men have never treated the subject as an intellectual problem pure and simple. So far as they have achieved their aim they have also recognised the moral element. Nor, of course, is a man's failure to appreciate the doctrine of the Incarnation generally to be accounted for by something wrong in his own moral character. Such cases are probably rare. What is meant is this. Most of us will do better if we come to the question from the side of our affections, our duties, and all that complex spirituality within us which we

sum up in such terms as "heart," or "love of God." And as this paper has nearly reached its allotted length, the readiest way to proceed will be to take one or two illustrative examples.

First, then, the actual life on earth, the particular character of our Lord Jesus Christ as really and truly a man, is proved by our experience to be all-necessary for us to remember and reverence. For therein we have the only revelation of God's character which is absolutely trustworthy. The Old Testament witnesses to a progressive revelation of God which may easily mislead if it is not completed by the Gospel. In fact, it has again and again misled good men and induced them to be cruel, to enforce religion by violence, and so on. Our several consciences may too readily be biased, as most of us know. And besides that, the best part of our conscience, public or private, has been shaped, to a degree no one can exactly measure, by the general acceptance for generations past of the standard of Christ. Yet even so, we are apt to fashion God in the image of our desires and prejudices. For the strange thing about the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is that it goes so contrary to what our fancy would have. An obscure career; all done by love, nothing by omnipotence, and many seeming failures; no gloom nor aloofness but much simplicity in happiness, as in the pleasure of quiet talk with chance comers; no far-laid plans, but loving trust, and this trustfulness shown both to the Father in heaven and to men; a very beautiful, austere, yet kind and, so to say, "natural" treatment of sin and sinners, hardly ever wholly imitated by even the best of men; final victory through tragic defeat: in short, sacrifice, the ideal of Christ's humility, sheer love.

Again, this earthly life is what alone can rouse us to that romantic loyalty which is the beginning and the perfection of faith for many, and these almost the noblest of the faithful, such as martyrs and missionaries. And if no touch of this loyalty be in our hearts our faith is almost sure to become dull and wearisome, sometimes to ourselves, sometimes to others. Of which kind of faith it may too accurately be affirmed that "that which is becoming old and waxeth aged is nigh unto vanishing away."

And yet "romantic loyalty" will sound but a meagre phrase to those who are at home in the New Testament. They will rather feel that it is only by virtue of the power derived from the life of Christ that we are enabled to live at the level of the Word. Only in Christ can we grip hold on the Word. The act of God, put out in the life of Christ on our behalf, is our sole qualification for living as the Word requires of us. Christ's historical manifestation is the sacrificial and sacramental means by which we receive our adoption into the fellowship of the Word. Only through the Spirit, released by the saving work of Christ on the Cross, did the Apostles arrive, by spiritual experience, at the doctrine of the Word. Few can hope to arrive where they arrived except by travelling the same road.

And, on the other hand, if no interest is taken in the Saviour's pre-existence, in all that which is implied in the sublime language of the Creed: "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God . . . Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven," then we fall to such a low level as when we style our Lord "the Founder of Christianity." It is a sad, cold title, and it leads to a sad cold estimate of our most holy faith. We think of it as having begun, a

new and local thing, twenty centuries ago. And we cannot but feel the misgiving that this religion among the other religions will sooner or later go the way of all particular religions, passing and being succeeded by another. But happily there is no such word as "Christianity" in Holy Scripture. Holy Scripture is full of Christ, and Truth, and Love, and Life; the eternal Person with His eternal attributes. There has never been a time or place where He was not. Nor has any religion, worthy of the name at all, been wholly without Him. Nor dares, nor desires, anyone who believes in the eternal Word, and knows aught of the love of Christ, to claim that his own creed, rite, church, holds the whole of Christ, or is unaffected by shadows that are not Christ.

Yet creed and rite and church are also divine. Not only through the things that are seen, but through the very imperfections of life here, we lay hold of the perfect and unchanging. Therein is the sacramental energy of life, which emanates from the supreme sacrament of the Incarnation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

That thought, indeed, of the Incarnation as the supreme sacrament, the interpretation of the whole sacramental principle, runs through all we have been considering in this paper. In the Catechism we say that by this word sacrament we mean "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us, ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof." There the reference is to the two ritual sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, which our Lord ordained. But these were fitted for His purpose because they were not to be arbitrary observances, but a particular application of that unity and interfusion of the visible and

the eternal with which God has ennobled the whole of his creation. The Church sacraments were ordained by Christ; all Nature was created sacramental by Him who is the Word. So St. Paul says that "the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even His everlasting power and divinity" (Rom. i. 20); and St. John has the same principle in view when he says: "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen" (1 John iv. 20). Keble's hymn "There is a book who runs may read" is a popular exposition of the idea. Keble meant more than that the beauties of Nature stir our minds with thoughts of God. He meant that these forms of natural life really are parts in the life of God, just as St. John meant that in the brother we really do see God, and in our loving service to the brother we really do reach God. So, too, our Lord says in the parable, "The King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these My brethren, even these least, ye did it unto Me" (Matt. xxv. 40).

"Even these least" is important. The sacramental principle is not concerned with pretty fancies, ingenious analogies, or the impression made on the mind by pomp and grandeur. It is an extension of the scientific fact, that all physical life is one, into the reasonable assurance of faith that all life is one, that the natural is also divine. Hence the very limitations, and sometimes even the repulsive aspects of visible life are sacramentally manifestations and means of approach to the eternal. And this becomes clearer still when we recognise that in the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ the whole of this sacramental faculty of life is

illuminated, consecrated, and assured. If the Incarnation is what we believe it to be, in it "the invisible things of God, even His everlasting power and divinity" are, in a measure which explains and includes all other partial manifestations, "perceived through the things that are made"—*i.e.*, through all the antecedents, circumstances, and pregnant limitations of the life of Him whom we call our Lord, and who lived as a man of a particular nation, at a particular time and place on earth. No mistaken reverence must induce us to widen the sphere in which He manifested himself by cutting away such natural conditions as may appear to our private judgment unworthy of His greatness. To say, for instance, that He is "representative Man" must not involve denial that He is "a man." The mysterious and the essential cannot be dissociated from the individual in any person, least of all in Him who is most personal. Again, no quality in Him is more mysterious than His vast but ever simplifying intellect; yet it would "overthrow the nature of a sacrament" to remove the mystery by supposing that He knew more than other men simply because He was God.

All such refinements infringe upon the doctrine which the Church received from the Apostles—viz., that the Incarnate Christ is very God and also very Man, not a mixture of the two. He is not, as the Arians once feigned—whose mistaken reverence we repudiate in the "Nicene" creed—a "heavenly Being," by so much less than God as He is more than man. We hold fast to the complementary truths, both the manhood and the Godhead, both the costly sympathy and the prerogative to save. And the seeming contradiction is resolved in the reasonable principle of the one, universal life divine, which in Him first, and then proceeding

from Him, links continuously the visible and limited with the eternal and complete.

The term "sacrament" has here been used in the broad sense which it often bore in the early Church. Of late it has been more often confined to a special significance, and some who read these paragraphs may complain of the writer's perversity in diverting a current word (which is moreover distinguished by peculiarly sacred associations) to unfamiliar meanings. He can only answer that no lesser word seemed adequate to the purpose; that the doctrine of the Incarnation itself is continually educating us to recognise divinity and sanctity rather in inclusive power than in unique privilege; and that, if dissatisfaction is felt, he welcomes the opportunity of adding a reference to the fine essay on "Sacraments" in *Lux Mundi*, by Francis Paget, late Bishop of Oxford.

ALEXANDER NAIRNE.

GTU Library
G
BT220 .N34
Nairne, Alexander/The meaning of the Inc
3 2400 00112 4076

BT 15586
220
N34 The meaning of the incarnation / A. Nairne

Graduate Theological Union
Library
2400 Ridge Road
Berkeley, CA 94709

DEMCO